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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2018  
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: PA MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS COUNTERING  
EXTREMISM, REACHING OUT TO USG

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer, Thomas M. Duffy, per reasons 1  
.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) PA Minister of Religious Affairs Jamal Bawatna and Assistant Secretary Salah Zuhayka told PolOff April 17 that on-going reform efforts at the Ministry are reducing extremist rhetoric in the West Bank. Bawatna said he is focused on mosques, religious schools, and other religious institutions to reduce the use of religious arenas for political purposes. Bawatna added that 25 imams have been banned from preaching after they used their sermons to criticize the PA and advocate extremist ideas.

12. (C) Bawatna told PolOff that the PA security forces (PASF) now screen potential imams before they are hired by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to ensure that they have no connections to extremist groups, are moderate, and focused on religion, not politics. Bawatna said the screening process is so stringent that he fears some moderate imams may be excluded based on unfounded claims of extremist views.

13. (C) Bawatna said he is grateful for his good relations with the USG and wants to strengthen these relations. He said he wants to improve Americans' understanding of Islam to convince Americans that Arabs are not their enemies and discussed exposing Americans to moderate Islam through a speaking tour in the US and other means.

DUFFY